

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5624

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2740

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

FOR EA ASSISTANT SECRETARY HABIB AND DEPUTY ASST. SECRETARY
ZURHELLEN FROM AMBASSADOR GREEN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OVIP, PINT, AS (MALCOLM FRASER & PRIMIN WHITLAM)

SUBJECT: WHITLAM VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND IMPACT ON
AUSTRALIAN DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE

REF: A) CANBERRA 2694; B) CANBERRA 2519

1. IN CONNECTION WITH REF A, IT IS ALMOST INEVITABLE
THAT WHITLAM VISIT WILL TAKE SOME WIND OF FRASER'S
SAILS AND MAY CAUSE RESENTMENT IN OPPOSITION PARTIES,
EVEN THOUGH THEY UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY WELL THAT VISITS
LIKE THIS INEVITABLY PROVIDE INCUMBENT PRIME MINISTER
WITH OPPORTUNITY TO PROJECT IMAGE OF CLOSE TIES AND
PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP WITH TOP AMERICAN LEADERS. AS
WHITLAM WILL BE SPEAKING TO NATIONAL PRESS CLUB AND MEET
WITH SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND HOUSE
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE IN COURSE OF VISIT, HE
WILL CERTAINLY OBTAIN CONSIDERABLE FAVORABLE PUBLICITY
WHICH WILL TEND TO SHORE UP HIS DOMESTIC POLITICAL STANCE
AT MOMENT WHEN HE IS UNDER PRESSURE AT HOME.

2. WHITLAM VISIT TO WASHINGTON WILL THEREFORE INTENSIFY
OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER'S DESIRE TO RECEIVE TOP LEVEL
ATTENTION WHEN HE VISITS WASHINGTON, HOPEFULLY IN LATE
JUNE OR EARLY JULY. IN MY LETTER OF APRIL 15 TO OWEN
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PAGE 02 CANBER 02740 030138Z

ZURHELLEN, I SPELLED OUT WHY I THOUGHT IT SO IMPORTANT

THAT MALCOLM FRASER MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. OBVIOUSLY, THE SOONER I CAN CONVEY SOME POSITIVE WORD TO FRASER ABOUT HIS WASHINGTON VISIT, THE BETTER IT WILL BE IN WEATHERING THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHITLAM'S VISIT NEXT WEEK. (FRASER HAS RECENTLY INTIMATED THAT UNLESS HE CAN MEET TOP LEADERS, HE MAY NOT GO TO WASHINGTON).

3. WE DO NOT RPT NOT KNOW, OF COURSE, HOW LONG WHITLAM WILL BE IN OFFICE AS PRIME MINISTER. OUR RELATIONS AT MOMENT WITH LABOR GOVERNMENT ARE BETTER THAN THEY HAVE EVER BEEN, BUT WE CONTINUE TO BE AWARE OF SERIES OF PROBLEMS THAT CAN CAUSE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES ON SHORT NOTICE (WHITLAM'S EQUIVOCAL ATTITUDE ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND NAVAL VISITS, HIS ATTITUDES ON INDOCHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA, IN LIGHT OF LATEST DEVELOPMENTS HIS UNCERTAIN STANCE ON MIDDLE EAST IF THAT SHOULD FLARE UP). BY AGREEING TO RECEIVE HIM IN WASHINGTON, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN MAINTAINING VIABLE AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP, WE NONETHELESS GIVE HIM A POLITICAL PLATFORM AND FAVORABLE MEDIA EXPOSURE BEYOND ANYTHING WHITLAM CAN NOW COMMAND AT HOME IN AUSTRALIA.

4. IT SEEMS TO ME TO BE ESSENTIAL TO BALANCE THE FAVORABLE IMAGE WE MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR WHITLAM TO PROJECT WITH BASICALLY SIMILAR TREATMENT FOR MALCOLM FRASER, WHO HAS SHOWN DEEP INTEREST AND DESIRE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH US ON WHOLE RANGE OF WORLD ISSUES. NO DOUBT, PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY CANNOT UNDERTAKE TO RECEIVE ALL OPPOSITION LEADERS WHO WANT TO COME TO WASHINGTON. AUSTRALIA, BECAUSE OF ITS POSITION AND THE UNIQUE IMPORTANCE OF AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED AS A SPECIAL CASE, WORTHY OF SPECIAL TREATMENT.

5. WE HAVE WORKED HARD TO ACHIEVE BALANCE, IMPARTIALITY AND EVENHANDED FRIENDLINESS WITH BOTH GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION. SO FAR IT IS WORKING VERY WELL, AND I JUST HOPE WE CAN KEEP IT THAT WAY.
GREEN

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